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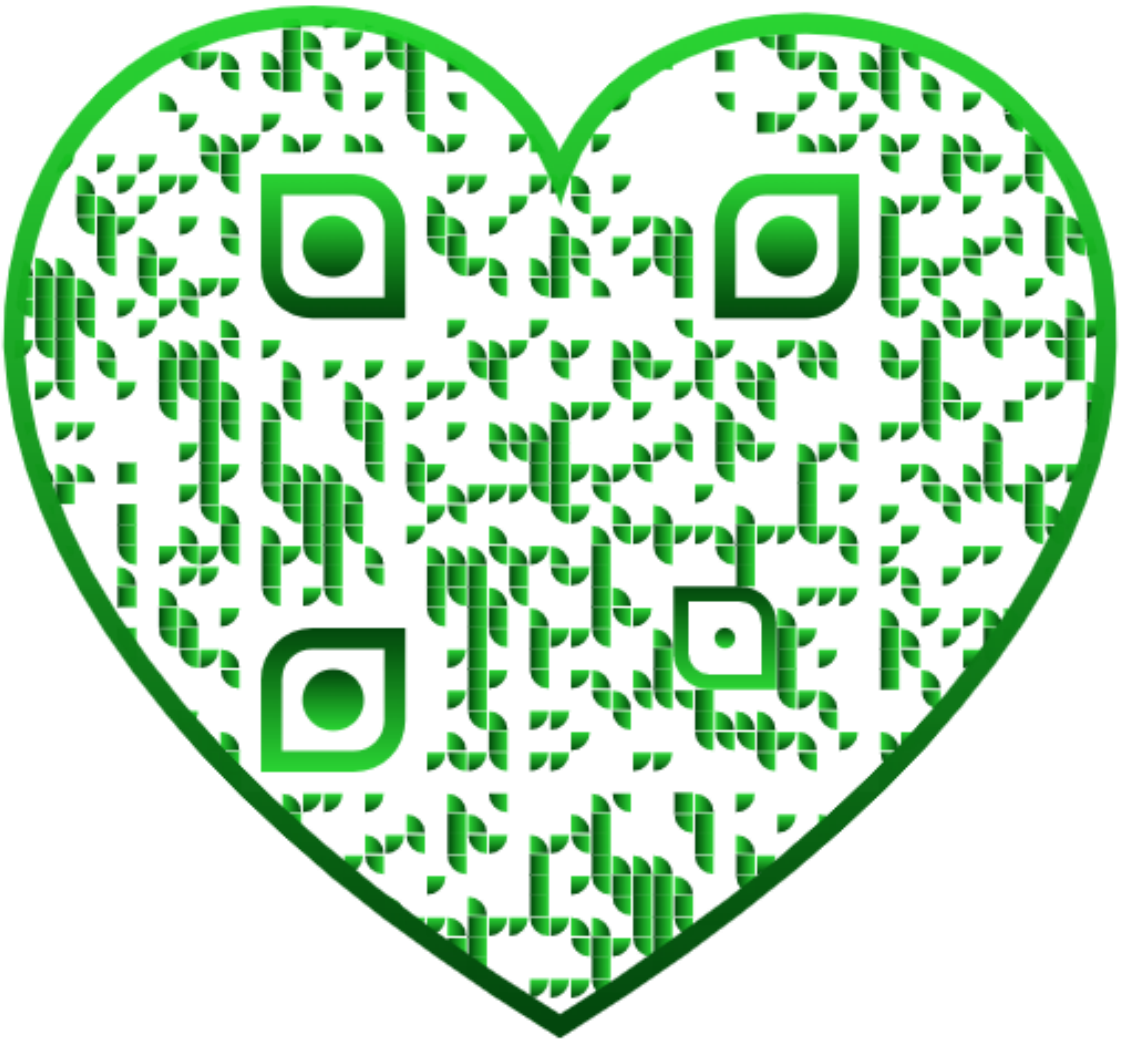
Alright petal, it's Blossoms



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Hello...

AS WEEKS IN 2016 go, this one has been comfortingly boring. No military coups, no mass governmental resignations, no major Kanye dramas. Having said that, there are at least two days between me writing this and you reading it – plenty of time for Morrissey and Marr to bury the hatchet and re-form, or for Donald Trump to reveal that it's all been a massive joke and that he's not really a megalomaniacal, bigoted despot. Nothing would surprise me this year.

The good news is, with no cataclysmic world events to distract us for a few hours at least, we can go back to doing what we all love the most – getting hyped up about great new music. This week's cover stars are Blossoms, a brilliant new band from that classic British indie lineage that brought us The Smiths, The Stone Roses and Oasis. But they're not just about the retro vibes; they've got massive pop ambitions, too, which – as we've seen from people like Coldplay in the past and now The 1975 and Bastille – is a recipe for becoming huge. Give the piece a read, then give the band a listen. We think you'll like them…

MIKE WILLIAMS
Editor-in-Chief
@itsmikelike

Harley Quinn p20

COVER STORY

16
Blossoms
In their own words: "We want to be big. We want to be massive. We're ready for it"

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AGENDA

WHAT EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT THIS WEEK

Frank Ocean's album is close

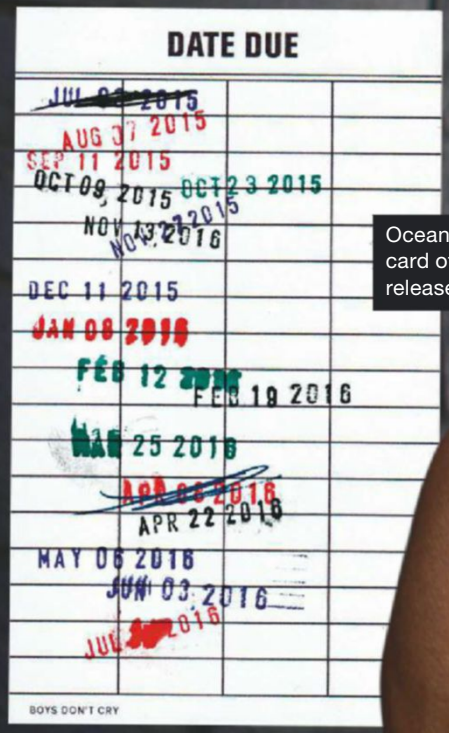
'Boys Don't Cry' will, apparently, be out on August 5. Fingers crossed

IT'S BEEN FOUR YEARS since Frank Ocean's 'Channel Orange' and we're as close as we've ever been to much-hyped follow-up 'Boys Don't Cry' becoming a reality.

Earlier this year, Ocean's website boysdontcry.co published a library card full of crossed-out dates. Release dates that had been and gone, perhaps. Two were in the future: July 2016 and November 13, 2016. It being August, July obviously wasn't meant to be. But it seems he can't wait until November.

Last Monday, a live stream appeared on Ocean's website which showed him doing things like cutting wood and sitting in a chair – anything, in fact, except playing his album. Fans were livid.

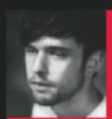
But not any more. At the time of going to press, 'Boys Don't Cry' will be out on August 5, exclusively on Apple Music. It's thought that Ocean will release a music video and printed publication alongside the record. Sweet life.



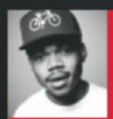
Ocean's library card of possible release dates

Frank talk

What people in the know have said about 'Boys Don't Cry'



JAMES BLAKE
"It's better than ['Channel Orange']. You grow, you improve, you nail a new message. He's had time to mature. It's cool to watch. He's onto something."



CHANCE THE RAPPER
"No one is able to find Frank when Frank goes away, literally no one. He's been away making a masterpiece. His new album is amazing."

MALAY, PRODUCER
"He's been working super-hard. He's exploring different vibes. I wouldn't say it's vocally looser, but his mentality… it doesn't seem as meticulous."

FRANK OCEAN
"For ['Channel Orange'] it was a lot of Stevie Wonder, and this time it's a lot of Beach Boys and Beatles and whatnot. So we'll see how it trickles into the music."

PHOTOS: KEVIN SCANLON/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX/EYEVINE, NABIL, JESS BAUMUNG

GOOD WEEK

DUNCAN JONES
Film director Duncan, son of David Bowie, and his wife had their first child. His middle name's David.

CARA DELEVINGNE
The model/actress slayed James Corden in a rap battle on his talk show. Bow down to MC Cara.

***PEEP SHOW* FANS**
News of a US remake upset fans. "If they remake it they deserve Trump," tweeted one.

BAD WEEK

Caleb McLaughlin (Lucas), Finn Wolfhard (Mike), Millie Brown (Eleven) and Gaten Matarazzo (Dustin) in *Stranger Things*

Stranger sounds

Kyle Dixon and Michael Stein – members of the Austin-based band S U R V I V E, composers of the mind-bending soundtrack for *Stranger Things* – go deep on their involvement with the super-spooky Netflix hit

THE DUFFER BROTHERS' PITCH TO NETFLIX

Kyle: "Matt and Ross used the last song from our first album [2012's 'Survive'] on a mock trailer they made to pitch *Stranger Things* to Netflix, and that was our introduction. They reached out to us on July 3 last year. I don't know how they found the band – *they* don't know how they found the band. When they asked if we were available we spent a month and a half doing demos every night. They asked us to write themes that might be for a character or a certain mood. Our demos helped them decide who to cast."

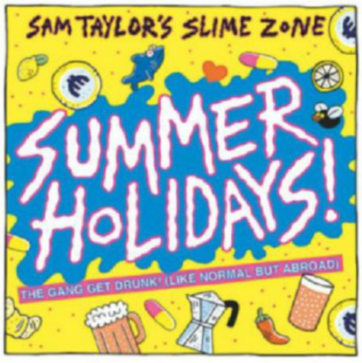
FAVE MOMENTS FROM THE SOUNDTRACK

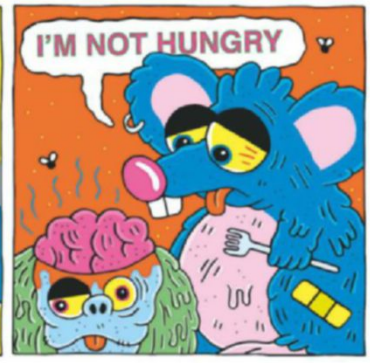
Kyle: "I like the scene where Joyce starts chopping down the wall, even though the music is buried by explosions and all these other sound effects."
Michael: "My favourite is the theme that plays when Nancy and Steve first kiss. It reminds me of Giorgio Moroder, that romantic, weird vibe from the '80s."
Kyle: "I also really like the theme that plays when they first find Eleven in the woods. It comes back a couple of times. And the main theme – that's pretty cool."

WHY SYNTHS SOUNDTRACK THE SUPERNATURAL

Kyle: "Every synth has a magical power. Every synth can do something really well, no matter what it is, even if it's the cheapest, s**ttiest thing. It'll shine in some aspect."
Michael: "You can make thousands and thousands of different sounds and you can emulate sounds. You can create the sound you're thinking of, or goof around with it, and come across something that inspires you. It feeds you and you feed it – and you have this interaction with the instrument. It's like nourishment."
Kyle: "They sound awesome, way cooler than a guitar."

***Stranger Things* is on Netflix now. S U R V I V E's new album 'RR7349' is released on September 30**





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Stormzy (centre) and friends at Thorpe Park

Parklife

Grime star Stormzy had his birthday party at Thorpe Park theme park in Surrey. Lots of weird st went down**

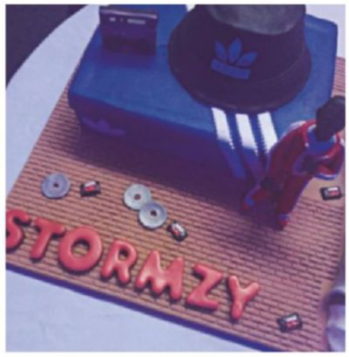
ON JUNE 15, STORMZY tweeted his birthday plans: "Yo @THORPEPARK I wanna bring like 200 of the gang to your park around July times I will pay but can you sort some sort of discount please". Last week he revealed: "I've managed to get the whole damn park to myself". The south London MC set up a competition to win the chance to attend the #StormzyBirthdayBash and 200 winners were picked at random to join him. Here are five of the millions of highlights.

The Adidas goodie bags

Party bags are few and far between in the adult birthday party world, but not if you're Stormzy. Every guest got an Adidas goodie bag with some customised swag, including special T-shirts made to commemorate the event.

The ridiculously detailed cake

No matter how much love is put into your next birthday cake, it won't beat Stormzy's. It had a fondant version of him next to an Adidas shoebox and other paraphernalia, scattered tapes and CDs, plus the MC's name in bright red letters.

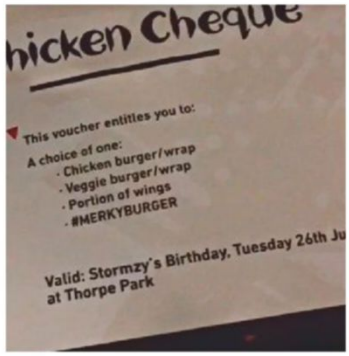


The other cake

Obviously, you can't feed a whopping 200 people with a fondant version of Stormzy. So there were other cakes, including one made to look like a nice big golden Adidas logo.

Free #MERKY burgers for all

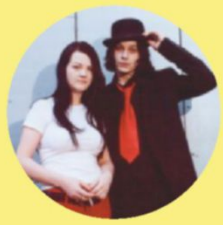
In March, Stormzy told Nando's they should do a halloumi and garlic bread burger. They did a mocked-up #MERKY burger menu, but it never appeared in the restaurant. At his bash, Nando's did the catering and it was very much included.



The surprise gig at the end

After all that chicken and all those rollercoasters, Stormzy still had the energy to put on a show and bring out a load of his pals, like Section Boyz, Novelist, Santandave, Nadia Rose, AJ Tracey, Big Tobz and Big Zuu. Things got kinda chaotic.

Last W33K IN NUMBERS



1,000

Musicians who performed The White Stripes' 'Seven Nation Army' in Italy. Insert your own drummer joke here.

8

HBO confirmed *Game Of Thrones* will end after season eight. Sad news for fans of dragons, nudity and incest everywhere.

29

A judge has denied 29 claims from people saying they're heirs to Prince's £226 million estate.

8

Number of vibrators in Mötley Crüe's official new line of sex toys, including one called Dr Feelgood. Good vibes.

YOUR TOWN. YOUR MUSIC. YOUR STYLE

What's ON your Headphones?

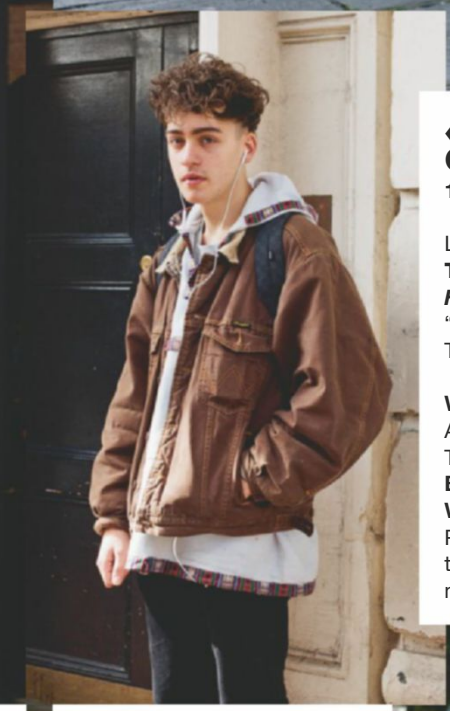
THIS WEEK

Royal Tunbridge Wells

JOE CRABB ›
24, supermarket assistant

Listening to:
BLACK SABBATH
Iron Man
"I'm quite old school. They were amazing at Download this year."

Wearing: Primark jeans and hoodie, T-shirt from Download Festival, Nike trainers.
Best thing about Tunbridge Wells: "It's got a vintage vibe. If you're a bit retro then definitely come here."



‹ DOMENICO CAMPOLO
18, unemployed

Listening to:
TUPAC
Hail Mary
"I grew up listening to him. The music is so inspiring."

Wearing: Jacket from Amsterdam, ASOS jumper, Topman jeans, Nike trainers.
Best thing about Tunbridge Wells: "Grosvenor Skate Park. I spend a lot of my time there, just chilling with my mates."

PHOTOS: NADIA RYDER

‹ DAISY HOLT
18, sixth form student

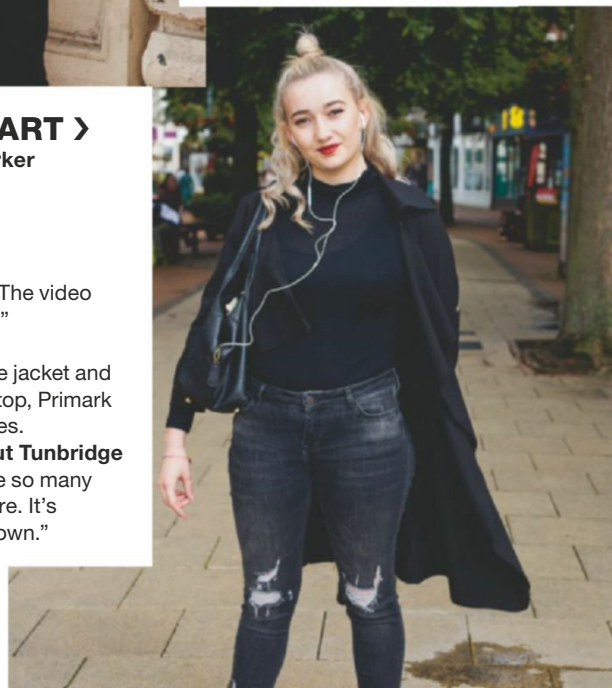
Listening to:
LED ZEPPELIN
Tangerine
"I actually discovered them through the film *Almost Famous*."

Wearing: Shirt from eBay, Topshop skirt, Beyond Retro belt, New Look tights, Dr Martens boots.
Best thing about Tunbridge Wells: "There's a massive Waterstones. I'm a big book fan, so it's perfect for me."

MARIE WIART ›
20, hygiene worker

Listening to:
THE WEEKND
The Hills
"I love his lyrics. The video is so unique, too."

Wearing: Vintage jacket and bag, Jean Fares top, Primark jeans, Puma shoes.
Best thing about Tunbridge Wells: "There are so many young people here. It's a perfect-sized town."



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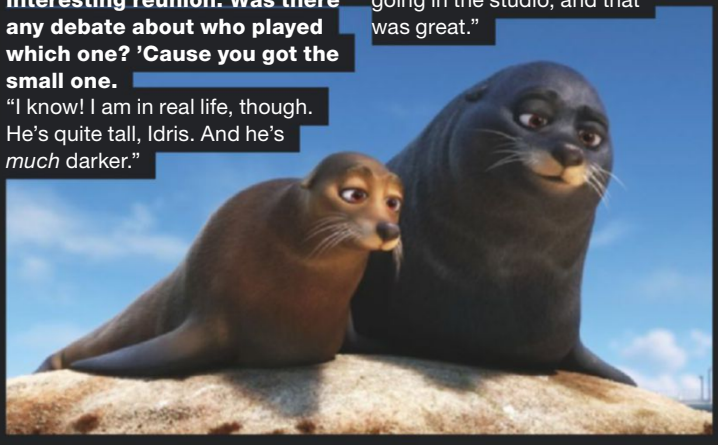
Go West

Actor Dominic West on his reunion with Idris Elba in *Finding Dory*, his idea for a spin-off film, and being too tight to visit Pixar's HQ in California

You and Idris, 12 years after facing off in *The Wire* as Jimmy McNulty and 'Stringer' Bell, play the sea lions Fluke and Rudder in *Finding Dory*. Interesting reunion. Was there any debate about who played which one? 'Cause you got the small one.
"I know! I am in real life, though. He's quite tall, Idris. And he's *much* darker."



Did you get to film it together?
"Well, you just do the voice, so we were in a recording studio together. So I could see him and eyeball him and we got a rapport going in the studio, and that was great."

Did you go off-script or just do what you were told?
"We did do a lot improvisation, which was cut out studiously, and then we did what Andrew [Stanton, director] told us to do. No, I think we improvised quite a lot of it and we mucked about with it a bit."

How often do you and Idris see each other?
"Er, about twice a year."

Like, socially...
"Yeah. I don't move in his circles professionally. I see him in New York. I try to avoid him, but he hounds me."

This wasn't a big after-a-long-time kind of reunion, then?
"It was a bit, actually. I hadn't seen him for about a year or more before we met in the recording studios, so it was good and we had a good catch-up."

What does it mean to you to be a part of a Pixar film? Once you're in one, you're part of history for children for generations.
"Good, I should hope so. Hopefully I'll be part of future Pixar films! It's great because they're the best filmmakers around and have been for the last 15 years. It's a treat not given to most actors. All the actors in the Pixar films I hugely admire, so it's nice to be among them."

Did you drop hints about wanting to be in further ones?
"Constantly. But Ellen DeGeneres [the voice of Dory] has been dropping hints about a *Finding Nemo* sequel for 13 years, so it's a long haul."

Well, you could do a spin-off.
"I know, I've already pitched it. A Rudder sequel. And if you could mention it as well, that would be great."

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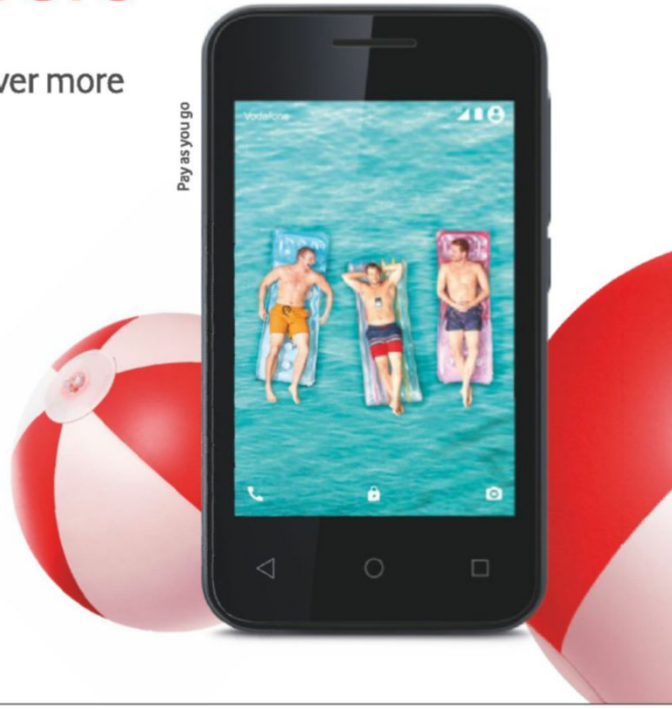

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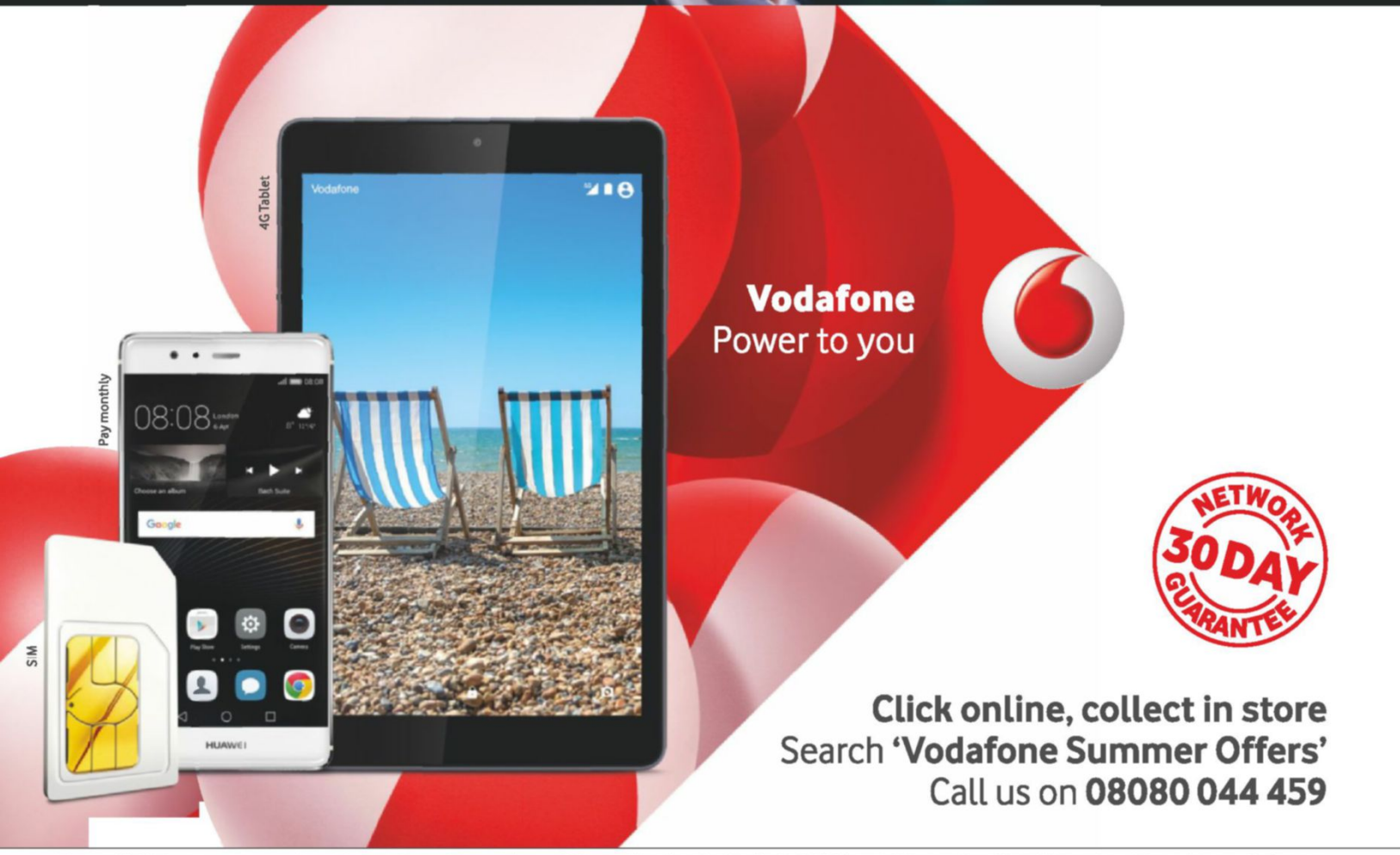
INTERVIEW: OLLY RICHARDS. PHOTOS: DISNEY PIXAR; FAMEFLYNET

Did you get to go to Pixar HQ in California?
"I wish! God, no. I'm dying to go."

I'm sure they could get you in.
"They've said, 'You're welcome to come any time you like,' but I'd have to fly myself out and I'm a bit too tight to do that. It's too far away."

You're not allowed to answer *Finding Dory* for this, but what's your favourite Pixar film?
"*Wall-E*, probably. It's a brilliant synthesis of moral tale and entertainment."

"I see Idris in New York. I try to avoid him, but he hounds me"



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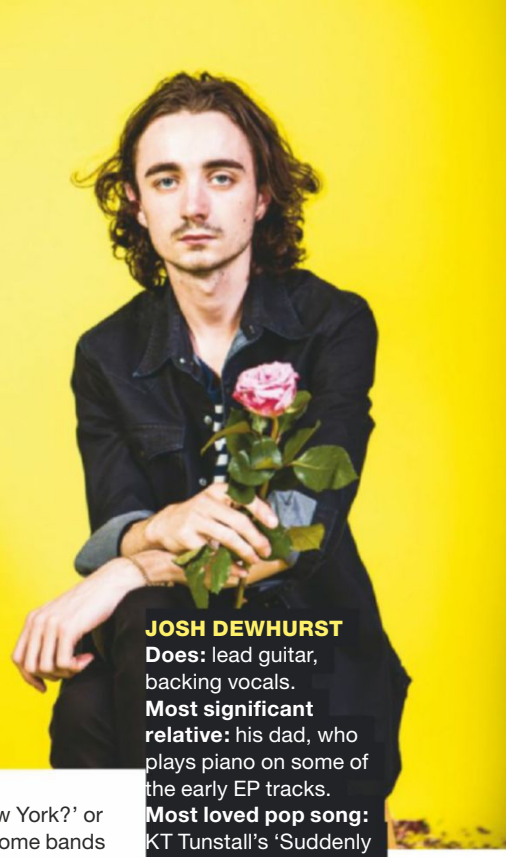
BLOOMIN' MARVELLOUS

All over the radio, getting mobbed on planes, a "timeless" debut album about to drop: Blossoms' moment has come. Hamish MacBain meets a band on an unstoppable rise

PHOTOS: JENN FIVE

TOM OGDEN
Does: singer, songwriter, guitarist, mouthpiece.
Karaoke song: Club Tropicana.
Album: "I'm still rinsing that Tame Impala album from last year. And I like this new band from Brighton, The Magic Gang."

JOE DONOVAN
Does: drums, backing vocals, co-mouthpiece.
Favourite song on 'Blossoms': "'Deep Grass' for me, the last one. It's really loose – we can all really get into it live."
Album: "Mac DeMarco I really like."



JOSH DEWHURST
Does: lead guitar, backing vocals.
Most significant relative: his dad, who plays piano on some of the early EP tracks.
Most loved pop song: KT Tunstall's 'Suddenly I See' ("and no shame about that").
Album: "I like a fair few on The 1975's album, mainly 'Somebody Else'."

THE OTHER DAY, Blossoms were on a rare day off in their hometown of Stockport when something strange happened. The five of them had met up with some old mates at a butty shop they've been going to for over 10 years, situated right next to the school they all went to and also not far from the houses they grew up in and the hospital they were all born in.

"So we'd just got a bacon roll and were sat outside," says singer, principal songwriter and speaker in interviews Tom Ogden, "when this car pulls up and someone jumps out to get a photo with us. Our mate, who we've known for, like, 12 years, had to take it. How weird is that for him? Right outside the school we all went to, he's there with people pulling up going, 'You're Blossoms, aren't you? Can we get a picture?' It was surreal. Very surreal."

Maybe so, but it would seem incidents like this are far from infrequent in the band's world at present. Tom describes their spike in popularity and on-street recognition – off the back of extensive radio play for current (and truly great) single 'Charlemagne', a triumphant *Jools Holland* appearance and increasingly incessant touring – as being "like a catapult". Today, as we watch them swagger through a mid-afternoon set in the sunshine at Norwegian festival Slottsfjell, there are girls pressed up against the barrier wearing 'I ❤ Stockport' T-shirts (the same design that's owned by one Matt Healy). And not a month ago, they were in the middle of their first mobbing, on a plane on the way to a festival in Spain ("I don't think @BlossomsBand can fly economy anymore", tweeted their tour manager gleefully).

"We kind of take the p**s out of it, don't we?" says bassist Charlie Salt of incidents such as this. "We see the comical side of it; we definitely don't take it too seriously."

"You just go with it," shrugs Tom. "It's fine. Nine point nine people out of 10 just come up and go, 'I love your tunes, can I get a picture?' and that's it. Someone might shout, 'You're s**t,' but that's just funny, innit? It's like, 'You know my name, I don't know who you are, so… see you in a bit!' It's not like we went on a TV show and it suddenly happened. It's gradually happened. You go out, one person recognises you; then you go out and two people recognise you. So we've sort of been edged into it."

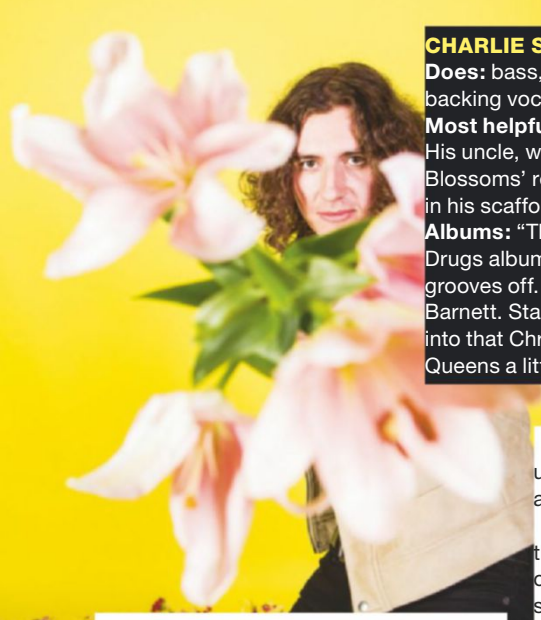
It's true that Blossoms' ascent has not been an overnight one. But that's the way they like it, and exactly the way they've planned it. They've more than done their time, as drummer Joe Donovan puts it, "sleeping in the van outside venues, or trying to sneak mates into a Travelodge", so none of what's currently happening has come as an unsettling surprise. "By the time we actually got signed, we were already selling out The Ritz in Manchester," notes Tom. "So we've done it in a kind of old-fashioned way. With the label, there was none of that, 'Oh, what about this producer in New York?' or whatever that some bands might get. F**k that. We just went, 'We're gonna go do what we've done for the last year and we'll smash it for you'. And that's what we've done." Joe agrees. "You think that when you're a band who gets signed that it's gonna suddenly be all champagne and caviar," he says. "But it's not. Well, for us it wasn't like that."

Before the ink had even dried on their record contract, Blossoms found themselves in a disused office-cum-studio within the grounds of Stockport County Football Club – a set-up put together by Charlie's grandad, who also owns the scaffolding yard where they rehearse – demoing new songs for the album. "Days after we signed the deal, we were in there," Tom laughs. "We were thinking, 'This is mad – that's happened, and we're just back where we've always known, going to Greggs to get a pie. But it's just that we've got a good work ethic. Everyone who's worked with us has said it's, like, an infectious work ethic."

"Because we all love it so much, it doesn't feel like work, or like you're even putting effort in," Joe says. "When you work somewhere and you get asked to do an extra shift, it's like, 'Ugh'. But when you're doing something that you're really passionate about, you just want to put everything into it."

Blossoms have been working hard for a long time now. When their self-titled debut album lands this week, it will be well over two years since the release of the 'Bloom' EP that introduced them to the world. From that, 'Cut Me And I'll Bleed' still makes the final tracklisting, as do all the truly brilliant singles that have punctuated the time between then and

"We wanted to write an album full of singles, just like The Smiths, The Stone Roses and Oasis"



CHARLIE SALT
Does: bass, backing vocals.
Most helpful relative: His uncle, who hosts Blossoms' rehearsal space in his scaffolding yard.
Albums: "The last War On Drugs album, I played the grooves off. Courtney Barnett. Started getting into that Christine And The Queens a little bit."

MYLES KELLOCK
Does: keyboards, backing vocals.
Tom on Myles: "People know that he's mad as f**k; they tweet us about him. Even though he's not said much in this interview!"

now – 'At Most A Kiss', 'Getaway', the re-released and all-over-a-radio-near-you 'Charlemagne' – giving 'Blossoms' the feel of a greatest hits before it's even started. "We've never been a band that's relying on one tune," says Tom. "We wanted to write an album full of singles; that's just the way we are, the same as the bands that we're influenced by and look up to. We think our album's timeless, like all those albums they produced."

Those bands are – as you can probably tell from the unapologetic self-belief – The Smiths, The Stone Roses and Oasis. Blossoms like lots of other stuff too ("Everything from Abba to The Doors to Arctic Monkeys to hip-hop," as Joe puts it), but it's the bona fide legends from just a bit further up the A6 that are stitched into their DNA. You can tell by the way they collectively gush when recounting the time Johnny Marr bumped into them in the Arndale Centre and told them he loved "that great pop record" ('Charlemagne'), or when Ian Brown tapped Tom on the shoulder to say hello at a party ("I went, 'I'm Tom from Blossoms'; he went, 'I know, that's why I'm talking to you'"), then asked them to support the Stone Roses at the Etihad last month. It won't be a surprise to hear that after they played, all of Blossoms stuck around to watch a headline show that, Tom marvels, "was already a success before they've even played a note – just because of that euphoria of so many people coming together".

But while they may have inherited their attitude and swagger from these bands, Blossoms have also been smart enough to eschew any retro-classicist tendencies. The shimmering synth line on 'Charlemagne', for example, sometimes feels sonically closer to the out-and-out pop acts it's brushing up against on daytime radio than, say, Catfish And The Bottlemen. To call Blossoms a guitar band or an indie band is, frankly, a little disingenuous. "Obviously we're influenced by a lot of that older stuff," says Tom, "but ultimately it's 2016 and we want to sound as modern as possible."

Interestingly, a key figure in helping them achieve this has been James Skelly of The Coral, who was onto Blossoms super-early after hearing 'Cut Me And I'll Bleed', quickly becoming their producer. Given his back catalogue, you might have expected Skelly to take them in a more classic, psych-y direction (which, as evidenced by early songs, they can do), but in truth it's he who's pushed them further and further towards a full-on, polished pop sound. Witness one brand new song on the album called 'Honey Sweet', about whose delirious catchiness Tom was initially slightly unsure. "I thought it might be too far down that road," he smiles, "but James had said, 'You need a tune that sounds like Taylor Swift could sing it', so we showed him it and he went, 'That's boss.' Soon as he heard us, he was like, 'You aren't an underground little psych-y band – you should be all over the radio.' And we were like, 'Yeah!'"

"But we've never, ever shied away from being catchy and poppy," continues Tom (who also, with a straight face, describes another new song, 'Smashed Pianos', as "Lana Del Rey meets Phil Collins"). "It's about tunes you can get up and dance to, tunes you'd have on at a wedding. I used to work in a hotel and I used to work countless weddings there. I think that's subconsciously gone in."

"We've always said we're a pop band," notes Charlie. "But we're not trying to sound like anything else. We're just trying to sound like ourselves."

Backstage at Slottsfjell, Blossoms are fitting in a couple of rounds of table tennis before they get in their van and head off to Austria, then Korea (where they've amassed a decent-sized following), then Australia, then back home. Tom says he's already written a second album and that the plan is to get the second record out quickly ("like Arctic Monkeys did") before going off in another direction entirely. "We don't want to stop. We feel like we're gonna be around for a long time," he says. "So it excites me, thinking about that. Like, 'Where are we gonna be in three years' time?'"

But we're getting ahead of ourselves, especially considering how exciting the immediate future is going to be. Because by the time of, say, Reading & Leeds (Joe: "That's going to be massive!"), Blossoms' album will have been out for a month and suddenly all the thousands of people they're playing in front of will know all the words to every song, taking them one step closer to the kind of mass collective euphoria they witnessed first-hand at those Roses' shows in June. At present, on the basis of how effortlessly great their debut album's turned out to be, it doesn't feel like it's going to take them long to get there.

Blossoms certainly believe this, regardless of what anyone else thinks. And more importantly, they want it.

"I don't understand why bands *wouldn't* want to get to that point," argues Joe. "You put so much work into it, you believe in it, why wouldn't you want to get to the top?"

"Everything we say, we believe in," Tom says. "We want to be that big. We want to be massive – we've always said that and we're not embarrassed about it.

"We want it. And we're ready for it."

NME

How yer garden grows…

A brief history of Greater Manchester bands' love affair with flowers

THE HOLLIES
They released album 'Love N' Flowers' in Canada in 1967. Then there's the name, obviously.

JOY DIVISION / NEW ORDER
First there was the lyric about "*scattering flowers washed down by the rain*"; then came the oh-so-pretty sleeve of New Order album 'Power, Corruption & Lies'.

THE SMITHS
Rare was the Smiths show that *didn't* feature Moz waving around a bunch of gladioli.

THE STONE ROSES
The juxtapositional nature of their name also spread to their canned 1985 album 'Garage Flower'.

OASIS
Er, OK, not a lot here, although Liam does blow a dandelion at the end of the 'Shakermaker' video.

THE COURTEENERS
"*Six acres of concrete wasteland / One sunflower standing tall,*" they sang…

BLOSSOMS
They're called Blossoms. They've got EPs called 'Bloom' and 'Blown Rose'. If these guys aren't opening a garden centre soon, it'll be a surprise.

20
Q
There's something about
HARLEY
Q
HARLEY QUINN

She's psychotic, cruel and wants to wallop you with a giant mallet. So why has the world fallen in love with Harley Quinn before *Suicide Squad* has even hit cinemas? Dan Stubbs investigates...

IT WAS MEANT TO BE THE Jared Leto show. In December 2014, when it was announced that the actor and 30 Seconds To Mars frontman would be taking the role of the Joker in *Suicide Squad*, Leto got all the column inches. First, there was a glimpse of him in character: tattooed, crazed, neon-haired and luridly cartoonish, a 180° from the late Heath Ledger's brooding, frightening Joker in *The Dark Knight*. Then we heard about Leto sending bizarre gifts to his co-stars (bullets for Will Smith, a *live rat* for Margot Robbie) and remaining so fully committed to his character that Smith recently commented, "I'm looking forward to meeting him. I've only ever met the Joker."

But Leto may be wondering why he bothered, because he's been well and truly upstaged. There's just one reason people will be rushing to see the film this weekend: Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn, just as crazy as the Joker but with multicoloured pigtails and a f**k-off mallet.

A kind of antidote to superhero teams like The Avengers, *Suicide Squad* concerns a bunch of dastardly supervillains forced into teaming up to fight on behalf of the government. Based on a recently revived '80s comic book series, its character list is a dip into DC's bargain bin, pulling out the likes of Captain Boomerang who – well, you can work it out.

But amid the cast of misfits, the film has gifted a long-overdue big-screen moment to Batman villain Harley Quinn. A fan favourite character, she's the runaway success story of *Suicide Squad* before it's even hit the cinemas, and the film's makers have noticed – a recent trailer focuses solely on Robbie's character, and a solo spin-off film was announced in May.

Quinn's influence is spilling out into pop culture too – Canadian musician Grimes said she channelled Quinn for her manic vocal performance on 2016 single 'Kill V. Maim'. "[It has] a Harley Quinn kind of vibe — like just sort of this Joker-y, scary demon chorus," she told *Song Exploder*.

Google reports that Robbie's Harley Quinn was 2015's most popular Halloween costume – some 10 months before the film's release. And at pop culture mecca San Diego Comic-Con in July, fans cosplaying as Harley Quinn were a ubiquitous sight. One of the Harleys tried to sum up the attraction for *Vanity Fair*: "She's chaotic. She's crazy. She's insane. She's messy. She's psychotic."

Harley's appeal *is* messy. Part of it can probably be attributed to the wave of nostalgia that's seen half the world glued to their phones catching Squirtles for the past month. Unusually, Harley Quinn was invented not in the pages of DC's numerous Batman comic books, but for the honestly-really-good '90s cartoon *Batman: The Animated Series*, which rendered the dark, dangerous Gotham of director Tim Burton's contemporary *Batman* movies in bold, art deco-style artwork. Harley Quinn arrived with no baggage, meaning the kids watching the cartoon truly owned this weird new character in a jester suit. She wasn't your dad's Batman villain.

There's also the slow realisation by DC and Marvel that *women actually like comics*. Market research in 2014 found that 47 per cent of comic book readers are female, but Hollywood's comic-based output has, traditionally, been overwhelmingly white and male. *Batman V Superman* bored the red underpants off cinemagoers earlier this year, but in a telling survey before its release, a whopping 88 per cent of respondents said they were most interested in the fact that Wonder Woman was in it. One of Comic-Con's biggest draws was the trailer for Wonder Woman's solo movie, proving that while Batman and Superman had the battle, the Amazonian won the war.

Speaking about the importance of female characters making it to the screen, Margot Robbie told *Stylist*: "I think the industry has recognised that half the ticket sales are female moviegoers, so you need to provide. It's important to have characters like Harley; it's super-important to be flawed. No one is perfect. It's a bold thing to tackle and I'm glad we did it."

But Harley Quinn isn't exactly a feminist antihero. Her origin story goes like this: Harleen Frances Quinzel works at Arkham Asylum, where the Joker is an inmate. After falling in love with her "puddin'", she gives in to her encroaching insanity and becomes his sidekick-cum-lover; the Joker, in return, treats her horribly. So we have an intelligent career woman gone gaga over an abusive partner. The message? Don't look for one.

There's also been controversy over representations of Quinn through the years. Her Saturday morning telly incarnation wore a modest Harlequin onesie and jester's hat. In her most recent reinvention for DC's *The New 52* she wore hotpants and a corset, boobs squidging out over the top. Robbie's version happily falls somewhere in between: bomber jacket, T-shirt, choker and smeared lipstick; 4am after a big night out with your mallet.

Mostly, Harley's appeal is that she's not Superman. Superheroes are goody-goodies; they're inherently boring. Harley Quinn is, by contrast, a real piece of work. In the *Suicide Squad* trailers, we see her beating an enemy to a pulp, joyriding with the Joker and stealing a handbag – all with a big grin on her face. "We're bad guys," she says. "It's what we do."

"She's chaotic. She's crazy. She's insane. She's messy."

After 2015's paradigm-shifting *Deadpool*, with its breaking of the fourth wall and Ryan Reynolds' wisecracking, scrotum-faced star, the runaway success of Harley Quinn seems to confirm that audiences are bored with the status quo. In Harley, they've been finally been given a dark, complicated female super-person. Don't bet on her being the last – but *do* double-check what everyone else is going as before you commit to this year's Halloween costume.

NME

PHOTOS: WARNER BROTHERS, DC COMICS

The evolution of Harley Quinn

1992
TV's Batman: The Animated Series
Court jester-meets-playing card
2002
TV's Birds Of Prey
Dr Harleen Quinzel does dress-down Fridays
2008
Lego Batman: The Videogame
Back to the original costume, but blockier
2011
The New 52: Suicide Squad
Harley Quinn as reinvented by a priapic pubescent boy
2013
The New 52: Harley Quinn
Make-up instead of a mask, fewer clothes generally
2016
Suicide Squad film
Harley does street style: bomber jacket, ripped T-shirt, two-tone dip dye

10 LIFE LESSONS FROM 10 YEARS ON THE ROAD

Band Of Horses' Ben Bridwell tells Leonie Cooper what a decade of rock'n'roll has taught him

IT'S BEEN 10 YEARS SINCE the hard-rocking, hard-drinking and hard-living US Americana gang Band Of Horses put out their classic debut 'Everything All The Time'. Following a run of triumphant UK shows and the release of their fifth album 'Why Are You OK', we asked frontman Ben Bridwell about the biggest things he's learned after a decade of touring.

SAVE YOUR CASH

"For the first four years, we were so broke. I was a scumbag. I never had money, so I wouldn't keep it when I got it. Luckily we toured so much we'd always have a meal out, or at least enough to get a pack of smokes. It's funny, the more popular you get, the more things come free. Clothes are free. Some chef wants to take you to dinner. It's wrong; the system is messed up. I'd like to pay for my meal and this shirt. Please give it to the band that can't afford even to eat today."

MEET YOUR HEROES

"Bruce Springsteen came to watch us at the Bonnaroo festival in Tennessee. We were on our last song but our manager was like, 'Bruce f**king Springsteen is here, play some more!' The only two songs we hadn't played were unreleased ones that we hadn't figured out how to do well. But he waited for us, came over and introduced himself. He was so down to earth. We played Coachella a few years ago and when we got done, the security guard says, 'You had no idea but Paul McCartney came to the stage and watched you guys.'"

BE WARY OF LOCAL BEVERAGES

"Just recently I had some fermented moonshine from Germany – it was from Bavaria specifically, and it was called Heil something. Little Hitler's brand. So I was like, 'Oh, I don't know about this, guys.' Fun-time juice or whatever the f**k it was. That was strange. We've imbibed for the duration [of the band]. We've gotten all the flavours. You go to Scandinavia and someone gives you Fisk – some weird brand the sailors drink, which is crazy-as-balls tasting. It's like liquorice."

DON'T BE A VEGAN

"I've been a vegetarian since I was 19. It was actually a bet. A friend of mine was kinda overweight and he thought it would be a good way to get on a strict diet. So I was like, 'OK, I'll challenge you. Whoever dips out first is a coward.' Then over the years I got used to it. I was vegan for a year and a half, but when I was doing promo in Europe, I was like, 'Oh my God, this is such a drag. I'm just a pain in the balls for everyone else, y'know.' So, finally, we were in New York recently and I was like, 'That's it, I'm getting a piece of pizza!'"

WATCH WHERE YOU SLEEP

"Our first time in Europe, in 2006, we were at this festival in Sweden and we'd indulged a bit. Someone had some Klonopin or Xanax and we drank a bunch of beers, and I was just asleep in the grass having a bit of a kip. A random punter didn't see me and stepped directly onto my nuts. And as I look up to be like, 'What the…?' the other foot comes down on my face. I think there's a human imprint still in the grass somewhere in Sweden. It was the funniest wake-up I've probably ever had."

PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER WILSON

DON'T GET TOO WASTED

"We did Pete Seeger's 90th birthday tribute at Madison Square Garden. That was nothing but heroes: Joan Baez, Richie Havens, all these incredible lifers in the rock world. We were doing a song – 'Turn! Turn! Turn!' – with Roger McGuinn from The Byrds. At moments like that, you don't want to get too drunk and be the wasted guy singing the wrong words or falling down. However, I got really stoned right before we went out to do our first performance. I was like, 'Goddammit man, why did you get stoned right before you step on Madison Square Garden stage for the first time?' I was chewing gum, so they wouldn't smell this, like, Blueberry Kush on my breath."

IT'S OK TO CRY ONSTAGE

"We were touring with My Morning Jacket and my wife brought our daughters to a show in Baltimore. My eldest was probably three or four and ran out on stage in the middle of a song. It was so cute. I was so moved by the moment, at her confusion and her innocence, that I definitely shed a tear or two. It was hard to finish the song, for sure. It was a beautiful moment."

BE CAREFUL ABOUT WHERE YOU PUT THE WEED

"I've been arrested on the road. We were starting a tour, so we were like, 'We need to get as much marijuana as possible.' We had two huge jars full of very stinky marijuana. Sure enough, we got pulled over and busted. We had mushrooms as well. So we got charged for that. Another time though, outside of Nashville, I was with my wife and I had an ounce of weed under the seat. I'd just filled up on gas, but it overflowed and spilled down the side of the van, right by the seat. I got pulled over again but luckily the gas saved me and the [sniffer] dog didn't find it."

DON'T GET TOO NAKED

"I ran across the stage naked one time. Someone had a bunch of damn prescription meds and was like, 'Let's take these!' This was at a festival in Australia called Meredith. Someone dared me to run across the stage naked and I did it, just in my cowboy boots and my hat. I ran to the other side of the stage and down the steps, then hid under the stage. I knew security were chasing me, so I ran back up and grabbed my clothes. Then security came up after me. I was like, 'F**k, I'll go again', and I ran back across. Never again."

GET TATTOOS TO REMIND YOU OF THE GOOD STUFF

"When Kings Of Leon cancelled their tour in America, we were stuck in Tampa, Florida, for a few days and had nothing else to do. So we got a 'friendship forever' kind of tattoo. We were supposed to be on the road with them – our whole summer had been booked, and they cancelled after two shows. Why? It was labelled exhaustion. We ended up booking our own shows for the same dates in the same towns. Just, like, at little holes in the wall and dives and stuff. We got on with it, which was cool."

NME

Band Of Horses (l-r): Tyler Ramsey, Bill Reynolds, Ben Bridwell, Ryan Monroe and Creighton Barrett

HOLD YER HORSES

A brief history of the band's albums in *NME* reviews

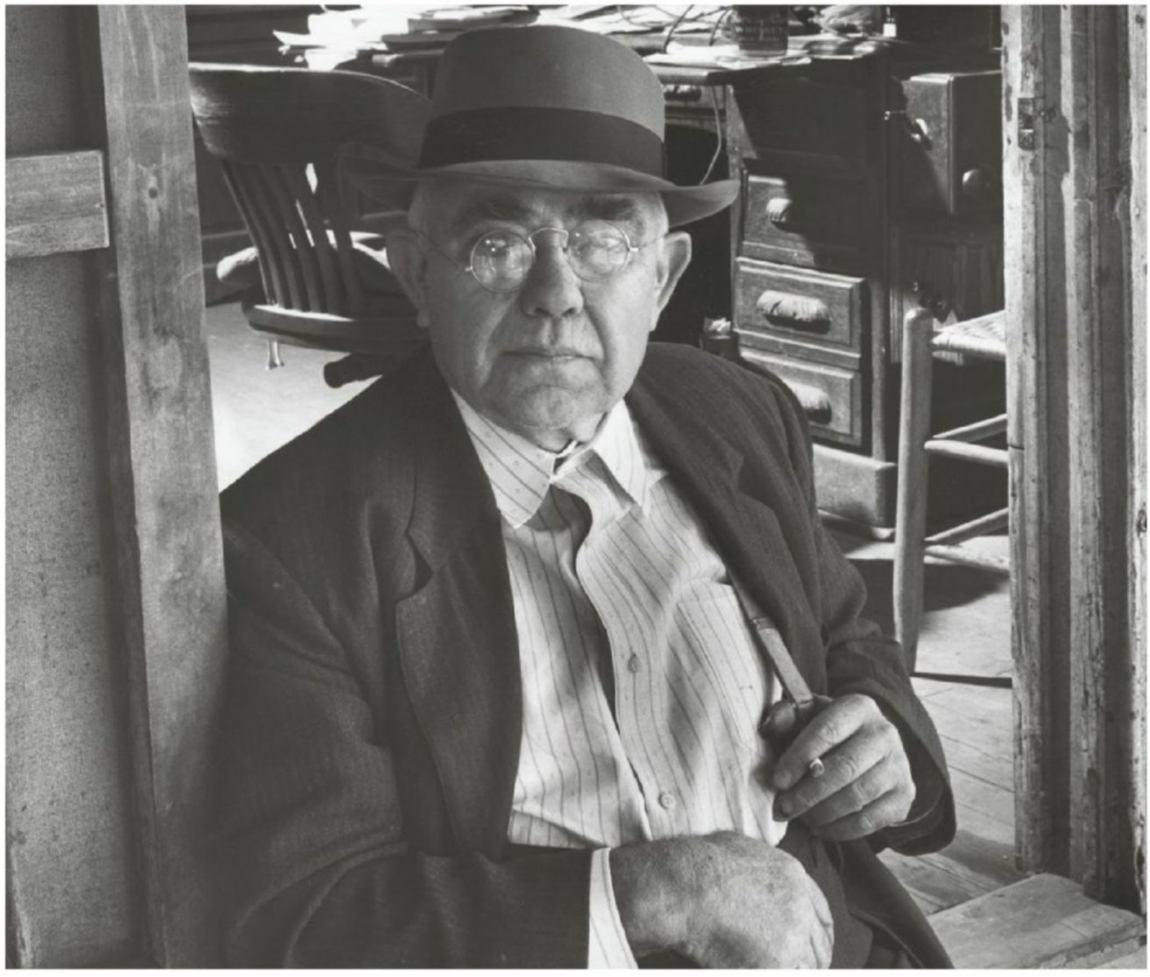
EVERYTHING ALL THE TIME *2006*
"They make rather lovely music: all widescreen swell and swoop and sweet, pained harmonies. Definitely not a load of old pony." **7/10**

CEASE TO BEGIN *2007*
"With angel-voiced lead singer Ben Bridwell at the fore, it's a delightfully soothing record. If there's one criticism to throw at 'Cease To Begin', it's that, at 35 minutes, it's too short." **8/10**

INFINITE ARMS *2010*
"Seattle's Band Of Horses are like a lovely, comforting lumberjack shirt. 'Compliments' comes over a bit like a weeping, heartbroken drunkard at the bar suddenly pausing to tell you a really funny joke." **8/10**

MIRAGE ROCK *2012*
"On 'Mirage Rock', Ben Bridwell and co have been jump-started with a new swagger. The title track – at once dreamy but rocking – encapsulates it perfectly, while 'A Little Biblical' is like a country-fied Beach Boys. **8/10**

WHY ARE YOU OK *2016*
"Band Of Horses continue their reign as the kings of Americana with another warm, homespun collection of heartfelt hooks." **8/10**



MANY YEARS AGO, THE FATE OF OUR WHISKEY RESTED IN THE HANDS OF ONE MAN. AND HE WASN'T NAMED JACK DANIEL.

What do you do when Mr. Jack himself leaves you in charge? In 1911, Jack Daniel was in failing health just as liquor prohibition was gathering strength. Tennessee was already dry, and the nation would follow suit ten years later. But when Prohibition was repealed in 1933, it was time to get back to work. So it fell to our second master distiller, a quiet man named Jess Motlow, to pick up making whiskey where Jack had left off. Jess was Jack's nephew, and he learned everything he needed to know about distilling Old No. 7 from Jack himself. He rebuilt his uncle's distillery and made his uncle's whiskey from nothing but memory and water from the Hollow's cave spring. So on our 150th anniversary, we raise a glass to Jess. If not for him, what's in this glass would never have ended up there.

JACK DANIEL'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE JACK DANIEL DISTILLERY 1866 2016

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RADAR

MUSIC, FILM, TV & MORE – THIS WEEK'S ESSENTIAL NEW RELEASES

Best NEW tracks
And when to drop them

BEST FOR TWERKING
KOOL KEITH
World Wide Lamper
Total legend Kool Keith returns with witty wordplay and requisite rudeness. The album it's taken from, 'Feature Magnetic', is out on September 16.

BEST FOR CRUSHING HARD
BASTILLE
Fake It
With a chorus full of thundering but languid drums and the latter half of the track driven by a skittering, crunching beat, 'Fake It' makes being hopelessly in love seem very serious indeed.

BEST FOR SHOTGUNNING A BEER
FIDLAR
Sabotage
The LA punk tearaways cover the classic 1994 Beastie Boys song with fire, fury and a kegful of fun.

BEST FOR KEEPING MUM
HALEY BONAR
Kismet Kill
The US songwriter muses on motherhood in this scorching, fuzzed-up pop song. A joy from start to finish.

BEST FOR CHANGING DIRECTION
WARPAINT
New Song
The LA gang's new song is called, er, 'New Song', but fittingly it signals a whole new sound for the band – somewhere between Girls Aloud and Fleetwood Mac. The poppiest they've ever been.

WARPAINT

BEST FOR BEING INTROSPECTIVE
GLASS ANIMALS
Youth
With a low-key swagger worthy of Wild Beasts, the latest cut from Glass Animals' new album is the kind of hypnotic track that will burrow into your brain for the rest of summer.

BEST FOR GETTING SERIOUS
GIGGS
Whippin Excursion
The London MC's new album 'Landlord' is out today and this moody cut positions him as one of the UK's most important artists.

BEST FOR LATE-NIGHT REFLECTION
ZOMBY FEAT. BURIAL
Sweetz
Hyperdub labelmates and UK electronic dons Zomby and Burial team up for this atmospheric slice of dubstep. One to get lost in.

REGINA SPEKTOR

BEST FOR BEING TOTES EMOSH
REGINA SPEKTOR
Bleeding Heart
The piano-tinkling queen of New York tugs on the heartstrings with her emotional yet uptempo balladeering.

BEST FOR BEING SASSY
TOVE LO
Cool Girl
Swedish singer Tove Lo offers a slick diss to any prospective suitors with this casual banger. "*I'm a cool girl / Ice cold, I roll my eyes at you, boy,*" she shrugs. So very, very cool.

For more new music, go to NME.com

TOVE LO

PHOTOS: RANKIN

Stepping out

Former backing singer Nao gets her chance to shine on this future-facing pop debut

NAO
For All We Know
★★★★☆
FLUTTERY SOUL LUSH

THE OSCAR-WINNING documentary *20 Feet From Stardom* offers a salient look at the fate of many backing singers. They might have vocals so bloody strong they could drag a 10-tonne truck, but mostly they end up stuck in the shadows of the big bands and massive artists they work for, the credit for their contribution to some of the world's biggest hits lost in the sands of time.

Nao could have easily slipped into that camp. A former session singer with the likes of Jarvis Cocker, the Hackney-based vocalist only decided to become a solo singer after the person who ended up becoming her manager spotted her singing at someone else's gig and decided she had the chops to go it alone.

At an impressively thorough 17 tracks long – including a couple of brief but lovely demos in the shape of iPhone voice memos – Nao's debut album certainly isn't shy about setting her out as one of the UK's brightest new talents. The first thing you notice is her voice, a fluttery but punchy thing with a propulsive kind of power. Oozing out in-between the bassy beats that kick-start 'Adore You', it's a magical, helium-enhanced melding of some of Britain's finest: Sade, Kate Bush and, um, 1990s 'Dreams' hitmaker Gabrielle.

Nao's style has been dubbed 'avant-soul', but her music is far more mainstream than that would suggest. It exists in a modern musical landscape that's had its foundations laid down by south London's dubstep wizard Burial and The xx's breakaway boy Jamie xx, whose wobbly party tunes template is now the rule rather than the exception. 'Feels Like (Perfume)' rolls together glitchy club sounds with traditional piano-led jazziness, while 'Girlfriend' boasts a lush spaciousness that belies its somewhat needy lyricism.

Nao's real flair, though, lies in embracing the old school and making it seem fresh. 'Get To Know Ya' and 'DYWM' both re-rub late '80s soul and push it firmly into 2016 with crisp production and an effortless dancefloor feeling. More proof, if it were needed, that Nao – and her odd but addictive vocal – belongs up front.

Leonie Cooper

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS!

ALUNAGEORGE
Body Music (2013)
Singer/songwriter Aluna Francis and producer George Reid's debut album laid lightweight vocals over heavyweight beats, drawing from garage, dubstep and classic British soul.

PHOTOS: GABRIEL GREEN, NEIL KING, TOM ANDREW

Swipe right

Wild Beasts' fifth album is a Tinder-tastic display of carnal desire

WILD BEASTS
Boy King
★★★★☆
SHAGGING BONKING DOING IT

ALBUM OF THE WEEK

WILD BEASTS HAVE ALWAYS been highly sexed animals. Theirs isn't the music you casually play on your laptop after you successfully entice a date back home following a bottle of wine and a moderately priced sourdough pizza. Wild Beasts have long been the actual sound of shagging itself; all fiddly and slippery and somewhat more complex than you first thought.

The follow-up to 2014's 'Present Tense' is a continuation of the London-based band's never-ending shagathon, but this time they've decided to house their fulsome electro-indie randiness in something of a concept album, one that picks apart the idea of masculinity, stripping it down in an attempt to reveal its hidden depths. Which are, you've guessed it, just as sex-obsessed as what's on the surface.

Consider us unshocked. In last week's *NME*, Wild Beasts bassist Tom Fleming bluntly and brilliantly summed up the premise of the album. "The last record was made up of love songs," he said, coyly. "This one is all f**k songs." That isn't just down to Wild Beasts' own saucy minds, but the enlisting of producer John Congleton, a man known for his fondness of heavy, guttural sound – having worked with the guitar-battering likes of St Vincent and extreme noisemakers Swans.

So alongside the creeping softness of 'Dreamliner' – which is full of Alt-J-worthy waves of sensual electronica – we get the biggest noises the band have made to date. 'He The Colossus' sees them experimenting with brazen riffage as frontman Hayden Thorpe sings the praises of the "*come-to-bed eyes*" of his "*junkie love*", like Suede's Brett Anderson by way of Aphex Twin. 'Get My Bang' is similarly huge, with a beefy bassline underpinning Thorpe's account of how he secures his shags. 'Eat Your Heart Out Adonis' follows the same path, simultaneously shuddering with raw sexuality ("*I like it messy / Don't you make it neat*") and 'Alpha Female' has hooks and heaviness in equal measure.

If they carry on at this rate, their next album will probably get them arrested. **Leonie Cooper**

FOR FANS OF

Wild Beasts (l-r): Hayden Thorpe, Tom Fleming, Chris Talbot and Ben Little

Dinosaur Jr (l-r): J Mascis, Lou Barlow and Murph

A jurassic lark

When the US indie icons deliver their trademark energetic bolts of molten fuzz-pop, they're as good as ever

DINOSAUR JR
Give A Glimpse Of What Yer Not
★★★☆☆
LEGENDS | US INDIE | RIFFS

DINOSAUR JR WERE ALWAYS too introverted to shout about it, but their first three albums – breakthrough single 'Freak Scene' especially – turned just as many Brits on to American indie rock as their more famous contemporaries Sonic Youth and Pixies did. After years of acrimony, the original trio of guitarist J Mascis, bassist Lou Barlow and drummer Murph reformed in 2005 to enjoy a career tail that's turning out to be longer than a diplodocus's.

'Give A Glimpse Of What Yer Not' is Dinosaur Jr's fourth reunion album, 11th in all, and finds the band returning to its amp-buzzing basics, following the mix of piano and keyboard on 2012 predecessor 'I Bet On Sky'. Rich organ chords add colour to the gentle choruses of 'Be A Part' but a crackling power trio sound dominates, with Barlow's melodic, thick basslines holding their own against Mascis's blistering guitar.

Rapid opening tracks 'Goin Down' and 'Tiny' are energetic bolts of molten fuzz-pop, close cousins to classic Dinosaur Jr singles like 'The Wagon' and 'Feel The Pain'. Mascis's lyrics are as downbeat as ever ("*Are you with me when I'm gone?*" asks the former, "*I'm all alone*" laments the latter), his introspective drawl countered by the effortlessness of his solos, pouring out his soul in a wriggling liberal mass of silver and gold.

Following the welcome break of 'Love Is…', the first of two stirring Barlow tracks worthy of his other band Sebadoh's finest moments, the record's second half sinks under the weight of Mascis's anguish. 'I Walk For Miles' is a tiring Black Sabbath plod under heavy, grey skies. By the time we get to the weary shimmer of 'Mirror' ("*I've been crawling around since I met you*"), he's on his knees.

It's left to Barlow's 'Left/Right' to finish 'Give A Glimpse Of What Yer Not' on a peak, a clear-headed confessional ("*You broke me down / Spoke to my heart*") with drums and bassline given space to breathe around Mascis's descending arcs of guitar fire. Despite its dips, there are plenty of strong reasons here to keep Dinosaur Jr from extinction. **Stuart Huggett**

PHOTOS: LEVI WALTON, BEN BENTLEY

Danny DeVito as Dave Schmerz, out and about with his wiener

A dog's life

Slight and stilted in parts, hilarious and memorable in others, all held together by a brilliant Danny DeVito

WIENER-DOG
15 *Ellen Burstyn, Danny DeVito, Greta Gerwig*
★★★☆☆
SURREALISM DARKNESS COMEDY

INDIE DIRECTOR TODD Solondz has built a reputation for pushing the boundaries of comedy-drama. Since he debuted with 1995's bleak coming-of-age film *Welcome To The Dollhouse*, he's mined a distinctive brand of dark, detached humour from topics as provocative as paedophilia, suicide and statutory rape. At first glance, his seventh film *Wiener-Dog* looks a little lighter. It's the story of a single adorable dachshund ('wiener-dog' is the American equivalent of 'sausage dog') and her lives with four different owners.

Yet unsurprisingly, Solondz's trademark darkness is looming from the start, as we see the dog being taken home by an affluent family whose young son Remi (wide-eyed child actor Keaton Nigel Cooke) is recovering from cancer. A scene in which the boy's mother (*Before Sunrise*'s Julie Delpy) struggles to explain what being "spayed" means is gloriously awkward. When the dog becomes ill, she's saved from being put down by a veterinary nurse who turns out to be Dawn Wiener (Greta Gerwig), Solondz's grown-up heroine from *Welcome To The Dollhouse*. In the film's most optimistic section, Dawn nurses the dachshund to recovery before taking her new pet on a life-altering road trip. We never learn how the dog comes to live with her final two owners, depressed film school teacher Dave Schmerz (Danny DeVito) and a truculent old woman known only as Nana (screen legend Ellen Burstyn), but these interludes in the dog's life both end very badly indeed.

Because it's essentially a series of semi-connected short stories, *Wiener-Dog* can't help feeling slight and a little bit stilted, a problem exacerbated by a Solondz's uneven tone. In an early scene, he slips into gross-out territory by giving us a lingering close-up of the mess Wiener-Dog creates when she suffers a bout of diarrhoea. Some viewers will have to look away. Later, there's a clumsy lurch into surrealism when Nana dreams she's being visited by the ghosts of alternate lives she could have led. Nevertheless, *Wiener-Dog*'s bursts of brutal comedy and memorable performances from a devastatingly sad DeVito and a brilliantly bitter Burstyn will keep you intrigued. At the very least, it's unlike any other film you'll see this year. **Nick Levine**

STRANGE BUT TRUE

Wiener-Dog is actually played by five different dachshunds, all "remarkably stupid" according to Solondz.

Bourne again

Matt Damon returns to his defining role in this passable reboot of the Bourne franchise

JASON BOURNE
12A *Matt Damon, Alicia Vikander, Tommy Lee Jones*
★★★☆☆
SPY | ACTION | COMEBACK

WHILE PROMOTING 2007'S *The Bourne Ultimatum*, Matt Damon dismissed the idea of returning for another outing as tough but troubled former CIA assassin Jason Bourne, saying: "We've ridden that horse as far as we can." Yet nearly a decade later, he and director Paul Greengrass have reunited for this belated sequel. And, sensibly, everyone involved has chosen to ignore 2012's *The Bourne Legacy*, an unnecessary attempt to continue the franchise with Jeremy Renner standing in for Damon's magnetic title character.

The script, by Greengrass and fellow franchise veteran Christopher Rouse, brings Bourne up-to-date by giving the film a somewhat clunky post-Snowden backdrop. As they prepare to appear together at a Las Vegas convention, the CIA's dodgy director Robert Dewey (Tommy Lee Jones) is secretly coercing tech entrepreneur Aaron Kalloor (*Four Lions*' Riz Ahmed) into turning fictional social network Deep Dream into a huge global surveillance tool. But, as ever, the story's real meat lies in Jason Bourne's restless quest to piece together his past. When his old ally Nicky Parsons (Julia Stiles) tells Bourne his father may have been more deeply linked to the CIA than he realises, Bourne's pitted against Dewey and his protégée Heather Lee (Alicia Vikander) in a continent-crossing bid to uncover the truth.

Although this set-up feels familiar from previous Bourne movies, Greengrass still manages to build plenty of tension as a CIA hitman (Vincent Cassel) tracks Bourne from Europe to Las Vegas, where he plans to confront Dewey. Jones oozes grisly charisma as the slimy CIA director and Vikander is brilliant as his scheming colleague, but it's Damon who carries this film on his hulking shoulders. Although Damon reckons he only utters "about 25 lines" in the entire film, his terse, near-wordless turn captures the character's conflict perfectly. When Heather Lee suggests the CIA could persuade Bourne to return to the fold, Damon keeps us guessing as to whether she's right.

Factor in some bombastic set pieces and a couple of slick twists and it's hard not to consider *Jason Bourne* a job well done. It's no radical reinvention, but Greengrass and Damon have pulled off a broadly satisfying franchise revival.

Nick Levine

FOR FANS OF

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: ROGUE NATION

KINGSMAN: THE SECRET SERVICE

PHOTOS: REX FEATURES, UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Under the RADAR

YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST

Dagny

Scandi ace dishing up icy and euphoric pop, including her worldwide megahit 'Backbeat'

DAGNY NORVOLL SANDVIK hadn't planned to be a pop star, even though music is in her blood.

Her mum (singer Marit Sandvik) and dad (jazz musician Øystein Norvoll) raised her in an "open and free-spirited" household in the small, arty town of Tromsø in northern Norway. She studied music at school and "grew up always falling asleep with music on in the living room, with musicians coming and going" from her house.

Her parents' spirit of collaboration wore off on her and she got involved in the local music scene, "touring and playing and having a good time" with like-minded people.

It was all pretty casual until 2011, when she sang on the slightly plodding 'Run River Run' for the Norwegian rock band Vishnu. But it wasn't her true calling. "I grew up in the '90s with The Spice Girls and The Backstreet Boys, who are just super-pop," she says. "I used to work at this dark rock pub in northern Norway, but pop is my area. I always come back to pop."

In 2012, aged 21, she moved to London. Here, she had fun, performed at shows and got creative. She plays acoustic guitar and when she wrote songs, "It was always the slightly more folksy stuff that naturally came out."

Then she met New Zealand songwriter Sam McCarthy – who wrote 'Don't Let Me Go' with Harry Styles and 'Team, Ball, Player, Thing' featuring Lorde – at one of her shows and they started working together.

"He's funny and unpretentious and we'd go into sessions and have a bottle of wine, and we were just kinda vibing stuff out," she reveals. "We did some really weird stuff before we wrote 'Backbeat' – some, like, talking songs. Then suddenly 'Backbeat' came about. I knew there was something different about it. It felt bolder and got me excited. It's more energetic and feels a bit more like me."

Now, 20 million Spotify streams later, Dagny's a star. One who "just wants to go up on stage and, you know, let loose", one whose second track, wistful piano-led belter 'Fool's Gold', is as good as her first, and one whose debut EP is coming out later this year.

Dagny's life is about to change. There's just one rule, she says: "I put no limits on it."

For more on Dagny, go to NME.com

FOR FANS OF

Best track

'Backbeat'

Rippling guitars, pounding drums and soaring vocals culminate in an exhilarating summer banger.

Details

BASED: London

SOCIAL: @DagnyMusic

FACT: Tromsø, the city where she grew up in Norway, also spawned electro-pop legends Röyksopp.

LIVE: August 28 Victorious Festival, Portsmouth
August 31 The Courtyard, London

"I grew up in the '90s – pop is my area"

PHOTOS: ED MILES, SARAH BARLOW/STEPHEN SCHOFIELD

live

THE MOST IMPORTANT GIGS THIS WEEK

YAK

WHO: Raucous London-based indie trio.
WHY: Their live show is a wild outpouring of energy and noise, fronted by the brilliant Oli Burslem.
STAGE & TIME: Moth Club, 9.30pm

MYKKI BLANCO

WHO: 30-year-old Californian rapper AKA Michael Quattlebaum Jr.
WHY: His sets are brash and hard-hitting – and he's releasing new music soon.
STAGE & TIME: Oval Space, 6.45pm

FESTIVAL

VISIONS FESTIVAL

WHEN: Sat 6 August.
WHERE: Various venues in Hackney, London.
WHY: As well as all the music, there's street food, exhibitions and markets on offer too.
FUN FACT: If you want a permanent memory of Visions 2016, you can get an exclusive custom tattoo on the day at the local parlour.
TICKETS: £35 from seetickets.com
ARTISTS: See above for highlights

LET'S EAT GRANDMA

WHO: Teenage Norfolk duo who look like twins and make something they call "psychedelic sludge pop".
WHY: Their dramatic live show is a creepy, gothic experience.
STAGE & TIME: St John-at-Hackney Church, 4.45pm

BLOSSOMS

Fri 5 Plaza, Stockport
Sun 7 Gorilla, Manchester

WHO: Stockport indie five-piece who came fourth in the BBC's Sound Of 2016 poll.
WHY: Their album is out today and it's a good 'un.
WHO'S SUPPORTING: No details yet.
TICKETS: Sold out, but available on secondary ticketing sites from £55

ANNA CALVI

WHO: Mercury-nominated singer and guitarist from Twickenham.
WHY: To hear her wield her huge voice in person.
STAGE & TIME: Oval Space, 9.45pm

PRIMAL SCREAM

Thu 11 Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow

WHO: Scottish rockers whose latest album 'Chaosmosis' came out in March.
WHY: Frontman Bobby Gillespie will be on top form in his hometown.
WHO'S SUPPORTING: No details yet.
TICKETS: £42.20 from ticketmaster.co.uk

SHOW ME THE BODY

Mon 8 Hare & Hounds, Birmingham
Tue 9 The Head Of Steam, Newcastle
Wed 10 Broadcast, Glasgow
Thu 11 The Magnet, Liverpool

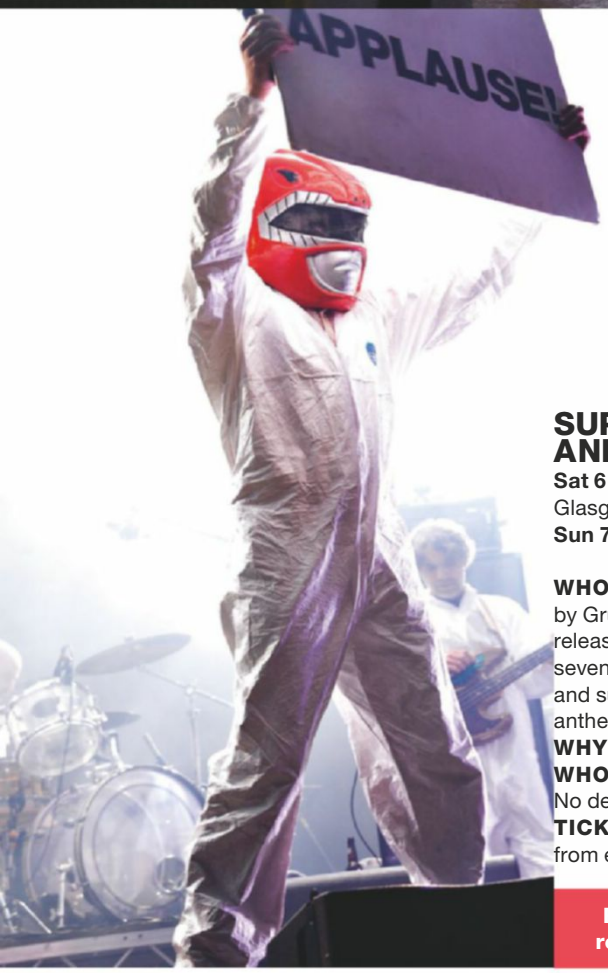
WHO: Young, thrilling three-piece guitar band from New York City.
WHY: They're so loud that they've been known to interrupt theatre performances in neighbouring buildings.
WHO'S SUPPORTING: No details yet.
TICKETS: £8.80-£9 from ents24.com

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

CARLY RAE JEPSEN

Sat 6 Pride Festival, Brighton

WHO: She's known as the singer of radio catnip 'Call Me Maybe' but the Canadian now makes stellar '80s-style pop.
WHY: It's Brighton Pride – it'll be fun.
WHO'S SUPPORTING: New pop artist Dua Lipa and DJ duo The Two Bears.
TICKETS: £25 from brighton-pride.org/tickets



SUPER FURRY ANIMALS

Sat 6 Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow
Sun 7 Fulham Palace, London

WHO: Welsh five-piece fronted by Gruff Rhys. They recently released their first single in seven years – the brilliant, mad and surprisingly catchy football anthem 'Bing Bong'.
WHY: BING BONG.
WHO'S SUPPORTING: No details yet.
TICKETS: £28.50-£60.50 from ents24.com

For tour news and live reviews go to NME.com

ALL SAINTS
Sun 7 Féile Big Top, Belfast

BERES HAMMOND
Sat 6 O2 Academy, Birmingham
Sun 7 O2 Forum, London

BRYAN GEE
Fri 5 The Qube Project, London

CLAMS CASINO
Thu 11 Village Underground, London

CLAY
Sat 6 Night & Day Café, Manchester
Sun 7 Parr Street Studios, Liverpool
Mon 8 The Moon Club, Cardiff
Tue 9 The Cookie, Leicester
Wed 10 The Rocking Chair, Sheffield
Thu 11 The Sunflower Lounge, Birmingham

THE COSMIC DEAD
Fri 5 The Hope & Ruin, Brighton

DEATH SPELLS
Tue 9 Broadcast, Glasgow
Wed 10 O2 Academy2 Islington, London
Thu 11 O2 Academy3, Birmingham

DESSA
Tue 9 Oslo, London
Wed 10 Soup Kitchen, Manchester
Thu 11 Clwb Ifor Bach, Cardiff

DIZZEE RASCAL
Fri 5 Bedford Park, Bedford

DON BROCO
Fri 5 & Sat 6 Esquires, Bedford
Mon 8 & Tue 9 O2 Academy Islington, London
Wed 10 & Thu 11 Engine Rooms, Southampton

DORJE
Thu 11 The Boileroom, Guildford

HAWTHORNE HEIGHTS
Tue 9 The Classic Grand, Glasgow
Wed 10 Sound Control, Manchester
Thu 11 Exchange, Bristol

THE HOOSIERS
Sat 6 Showground, Lincoln

I DECLARE WAR
Wed 10 The Green Door Store, Brighton
Thu 11 Audio, Glasgow

JAMIE CULLUM
Thu 11 Royal Albert Hall, London

READER'S PICK

JOEL CARTER
19
@joelistheebest

ALLUSONDRUGS
Fri 5 The Lady Luck, Canterbury
Sun 7 The Joiners, Southampton
Mon 8 Underground, Plymouth
Tue 9 Cobblestones, Bridgwater
Wed 10 The Firebug, Leicester
Thu 11 Sticky Mike's Frog Bar, Brighton

"I'm seeing them for the fifth time and they've been great every time."

JULIO BASHMORE
Sat 6 Rojo, St Helier

THE KOOKS
Sat 6 Féile Big Top, Belfast

THE KUT
Sat 6 The Hop Inn, Blackpool
Sun 7 The Bobbin, Lancaster
Tue 9 Bloc+, Glasgow
Wed 10 Bannermans, Edinburgh
Thu 11 Bootleggers Bar, Kendal

MADNESS
Fri 5 Corn Exchange, Edinburgh

MAN OF MOON
Fri 5 Electric Circus, Edinburgh

MARTHA
Fri 5 The Hairy Dog, Derby
Sat 6 West Hill Hall, Brighton
Thu 11 The Hippodrome, Kingston upon Thames

MATTHEW HERBERT
Wed 10 The Roundhouse, London

MK
Sat 6 Lush!, Portrush

MNDSGN
Fri 5 The Jazz Café, London

NAPOLEON
Fri 5 The Black Prince, Northampton
Sun 7 Key Club, Leeds
Tue 9 Studio 24, Edinburgh
Wed 10 The Classic Grand, Glasgow
Thu 11 Rebellion, Manchester

NOVELIST
Thu 11 Selfridges, London

ONEMAN
Fri 5 XOYO, London
Sat 6 Hatfield House, Hatfield

PLAZA
Fri 5 Surf Café, Tynemouth

RACHEL SERMANNI
Wed 10 Summerhall, Edinburgh

RYLEY WALKER
Fri 5 St Mary in the Castle, Hastings
Mon 8 The Globe, Cardiff
Tue 9 Zephyr Lounge, Leamington Spa
Wed 10 Crescent WMC, York

SAID THE MAIDEN
Tue 9 The Royal British Legion, Westcliff-on-Sea

THUNDERCAT
Tue 9 Brudenell Social Club, Leeds

WILLIS EARL BEAL
Tue 9 The Forge, London
Wed 10 The Globe, Cardiff
Thu 11 Summerhall, Edinburgh

YORKSTON THORNE KHAN
Sat 6 Crescent Arts Centre, Belfast

CLUB NME
THE BULLETPROOF BOMB
Fri 5 Koko, London

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SAT 22 LIVERPOOL ARTS CLUB

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6 EXETER, CAVERN
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8 GLASGOW, O2 ABC2
9 LIVERPOOL, ARTS CLUB
10 BIRMINGHAM, O2 ACADEMY3
11 OXFORD, O2 ACADEMY2
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Soundtrack of my life

Aubrey Plaza

Eye-rolling actress of *Parks And Recreation* glory

THE FIRST GIG I WENT TO

THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

Trocadero Theatre, Philadelphia

"I'm actually not a big concert-goer, but I had a friend who was obsessed with them. He took me along to their show when we were in middle school and I remember just having a really great time. I've seen them live a bunch of times since, so I guess I've kind of built up a cool personal history with this band."

THE SONG I DO AT KARAOKE

ENYA

Only Time

"I really like doing this song at karaoke. I mean, it's not what you'd call a crowd-pleaser, but it makes me laugh. So I either do Enya or an old-school Garth Brooks song like 'Ain't Going Down ('Til The Sun Comes Up)'. It's kind of a country-rap song and I know every single word to it. It blows people's minds. I think this might surprise a lot of people, but growing up I was actually really into Garth Brooks."

THE FIRST ALBUM I BOUGHT

JUDY GARLAND

Judy At Carnegie Hall

"I'm pretty sure that I when I was about 12 I bought my local music store's entire stock of Judy Garland albums. I did a book report on her for school, so I started watching her movies and became kind of infatuated with her. I thought it was pretty cool when Rufus Wainwright did his remake of her Carnegie Hall show. I mean, you're never gonna compete with the greatest singer of all time, but it was a beautiful homage."

THE SONG I CAN'T GET OUT OF MY HEAD

DAVID BOWIE

The Man Who Sold The World

"This song gets stuck in my head, like, all the time. Especially the intro. But I don't mean that in an annoying way. I love this song, so I like having it stuck in my head. David Bowie is one of my all-time favourites too."

THE SONG THAT REMINDS OF *PARKS AND RECREATION*

T.I. FEAT. JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

Dead And Gone

"I know this sounds weird, but for some reason in the first couple of seasons of *Parks And Recreation* Amy Poehler, Rashida Jones, Chris Pratt and I would all blast out this song in the make-up trailer during lunch. It kind of became our pick-me-up song and we'd all be singing along at the top of our lungs."

THE SONG THAT I PLAY AT WORK

AMY WINEHOUSE

Back To Black

"I play a lot of Amy Winehouse in my trailer. It's go-to comfort music for me. I really like her song 'Stronger Than Me' too, but I think 'Back To Black' is probably the best song ever. I mean, her lyrics are like poetry. I watched the documentary *Amy* recently and I just found it devastating. It made me realise how big of a loss it was that someone so talented died so young."

THE SONG I WISH I'D WRITTEN

BONNIE RAITT

I Can't Make You Love Me

"I mean, this is just such a beautiful song. But I'm really running with the depressing theme now, aren't I?"

THE SONG I WANT PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL

JUDY GARLAND

Get Happy

"I mean, I'd have to pick a Judy song for sure. I like the idea of this one because it's, like, even though I'm dead people could come together to get happy with each other. Does that sound weird?"

***Mike And Dave Need Wedding Dates* is in cinemas August 10**

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LAST WORD

The wisdom of the *NME* archives

THIS WEEK

SID VICIOUS

Sex Pistols

August 6, 1977

"We're quite nice, friendly chappies, really, but everyone has a beastly side to them, don't they?"

INTERVIEW: NICK LEVINE. PHOTOS: REX FEATURES, GETTY IMAGES